



Pontefract Office:
Off Southgate
Pontefract
West Yorkshire WF8 1NT
t 0845 601 0649
f 01977 70 70 70
e resource.centre@solaceenterprises.com
www.solaceenterprises.com

Exmoor National Park Authority

Performance Assessment Report

October 2012



Contents

1	Introductory Comments	3
2	Background	3
3	The Exmoor NPA performance assessment process.....	4
4	Theme 1: Quality of vision and the Authority’s plans to help achieve it.....	5
5	Theme 2: Setting and using priorities	6
6	Theme 3: Achievement of outcomes: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park	8
7	Theme 4: Achievement of outcomes: promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities by the public	11
8	Theme 5: Achievement of outcomes: wider sustainable development.....	12
9	Theme 6: Organisational capacity, use of resources, and governance	14
10	Theme 7: Leadership & Improving performance	16
11	Good Practice and Special Features	18
12	Recommendations	18
13	Summary of Assessment Scores.....	20



1 Introductory Comments

- 1.1 The Exmoor NPA (the Authority) is self aware and this showed through in the content of the self assessment document and the draft improvement plan produced to inform the assessment team. With this background it was not surprising that many of the issues identified by the team were already known to the Authority. Where relevant these have been included in the issues to consider under the seven themes of the standard Key Lines of Enquiry.
- 1.2 The Authority has applied itself well to creating improvements since its last National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA) in 2005. It has produced and delivered its 2007-12 National Park Management Plan (NPMP) and moved on to develop the 2012-17 Partnership Plan. The organisational learning and improvement that it has applied over this period is represented in the report.
- 1.3 A feature of this current NPAPA is the raising of expectations within the Key Lines of Enquiry to increase the standards of performance required to attain each of the four possible assessment levels. These are: performing poorly (1), performing adequately (2), performing well (3) and performing excellently (4). With a grading of 2 as acceptable baseline performance, an Authority that obtains a grading of 3 for a theme will be performing in an above average way and delivering to a very high standard. A grading of 4 will show exceptional delivery. The assessment scores for this Authority are shown on the last page of this report.

2 Background

- 2.1 National Park Authorities (NPA) are required to achieve best value through structured approaches which improve their effectiveness, efficiency and economy.
- 2.2 To provide an objective external assessment of the individual Authority's performance, each Authority is subject to periodic review through the National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA).
- 2.3 The NPAPA methodology uses a peer review team approach which is led and facilitated by SOLACE Enterprises. The process was developed and first applied for most NPAs in 2005. It is based on best practice assessment for public bodies and uses techniques similar to the former Comprehensive Performance Assessment. NPAPA has been agreed by Defra, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Audit Commission and the English National Park Authorities Association as the appropriate approach for NPAs.
- 2.4 The NPAPA process is intended to give each Authority a better appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses in order to assist it to improve the quality of the important services which it offers to the public. It will show how good the Authority's performance is in delivering its strategic objectives and outcomes and where it can make improvements.



- 2.5 The aims of peer assessment are to:
- Provide an objective, robust and managed external challenge to the Authority's self assessment of its current performance;
 - Encourage thinking about strengths and areas for improvement;
 - Contribute to strong and forward looking improvement planning.
- 2.6 The SOLACE Enterprises model of peer assessment for Authority's involves an NPA Chief Executive, a local Authority Chief Executive, an NPA member and an NPA Staff reviewer, all working with a SOLACE Enterprises facilitator for 4 or 5 days on site. This model has been specifically designed for providing peer assessment for national parks.

3 The Exmoor NPA performance assessment process

- 3.1 The assessment of Exmoor NPA began several weeks before the October 2012 on site period. A provisional timetable of activities was drawn up and background documentation was circulated to the peer review team prior to their visit. This included the Authority's own self assessment which was considered closely by the whole team to help determine the focus of the assessment.
- 3.2 The team was:
- Julian Johnson, Chairman, New Forest NPA,
 - Tony Gates, Chief Executive (National Park Officer), Northumberland NPA.
 - Ken Lloyd, SOLACE Facilitator
 - Walter Delin, Ex-Chief Executive, Wyre Forest District Council.
 - Joanna Swiers, Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Yorkshire Dales NPA
- 3.3 On the evening prior to the visit the team met to prepare for the assessment process. In that preparatory meeting the team:
- Reviewed the proposed methodology for the assessment.
 - Reviewed the background information provided by the Authority, including the self-assessment, the related evidence and documentation.
 - Agreed initial lines of enquiry to be pursued during the visit and any additional activities and documentation that was needed to gather information on these.
 - Confirmed the team roles and responsibilities for the assessment period.
- 3.4 The team had regard to the whole of the published Key Lines of Enquiry for NPAPA, but gave particular attention to the issues that appeared from the documentation to warrant more detailed focus. In assessments such as these, the team cannot look at absolutely everything in the same level of detail and the process needs to be bounded in some way.
- 3.5 The various methods that the team used to gather information included:
- Face to face and telephone interviews with a cross section of stakeholders from inside and outside the Authority.
 - Small group discussions with staff, members and partners.
 - A tour of the area to familiarise the team with the National Park.
 - A review of documents provided by the Authority before and during the visit.



- 3.6 Throughout the process the team held a continuing dialogue with the Authority to reflect back what they were learning and the way that their views were forming. This provided the Authority with an opportunity to present the team with additional information and also helped to generate ownership of our feedback and the thinking and reasoning behind our views.
- 3.7 On the final day of the visit the team fed back the results of the information gathering process in a more structured way.
- 3.8 The team took care to note areas of strength as well as areas for improvement. However, the main aim of the assessment process is to stimulate improvement, so comparatively more attention has been given in this report to explaining and evidencing the areas on which the team believes the Authority should focus its attention in the future.
- 3.9 The following sections describe the team's assessment of the Authority's performance against the seven themes of the published Key Lines of Enquiry.

4 Theme 1: Quality of vision and the Authority's plans to help achieve it

Strengths:

- 4.1 A clear vision and set of strategic objectives exist. The vision of "Working together for Exmoor" leads to three supporting themes of: "A Thriving, Living Landscape; "Connecting People and Places"; and "Towards a Sustainable Future". It connects well to the 12 priorities in the Partnership Plan 2012-17.
- 4.2 There has been considerable engagement in the development of the Partnership Plan. Extensive consultation exercises have taken place to understand the views, needs and priorities of communities and stakeholders. Meaningful consultation and local information underpins the objectives which build on the State of the Park report, and have a focus on the special qualities which are clearly set out.
- 4.3 Partners are well connected to the strategic vision. The vision, National Park Management Plan 2007-12 (NPMP), and now the Partnership Plan 2012-17 (Partnership Plan) have been developed with the close engagement of partners. The Partnership Plan sets out delivery "actions" with identified lead organisations. The vision and objectives are robust and relate well to the needs of the National Park, partners and communities.
- 4.4 There was substantial partner contribution and involvement in the delivery of the NPMP. 55 partners had committed to being lead organisations to delivery elements of the NPMP and the effectiveness of this approach is reflected in the 2012 achievement awards. 34 organisations were rewarded for specific and significant achievement delivered across the spectrum of National Park activity and showed a considerable amount of effort by partners.
- 4.5 The Partnership Plan cascades well into the Business Plan which details the actions to meet the five internal priorities alongside the 12 priorities of the Partnership Plan.



- 4.6 The new framework for delivering the Partnership Plan looks promising. The creation of an Exmoor Partnership Panel and the use of Strategic Overview Groups once fully functional should help provide positive engagement with organisations to ensure manageable delivery of the priorities. In addition there will be annual reviews; on-going monitoring of the state of the park; and an annual meeting of delivery partners to report on progress.
- 4.7 There is a creative approach to research. Creative research projects are commissioned by the Authority to expand its data and information. Alongside the more usual visitor, user and residents surveys other projects are undertaken to give fuller intelligence. For example the Landscape Perceptions Study gained access to how members of the public feel about the different landscape types, and the Non-Visitor Survey sought to understand the countryside visiting habits of non-visitors to the National Park.

Issues to consider:

- 4.8 Lead partners are not yet adequately connected to the Partnership Plans delivery framework. Most Partners are still unaware how the Partnership Panel and Strategic Overview Groups will operate and remain uncertain about how they will work in practice. It is recognised that the delivery mechanisms are still being developed, with the Strategic Overview Groups being established and due to hold their first meetings by December 2012 and the first Partnership Panel due in February 2013 it is timely to reconfirm with partners how this delivery process will be structured and delivered.
- 4.9 Many Partnership Plan activities lack measurable outcomes or milestones towards delivery. In addition measurable targets don't exist for many of the actions that the Plan or the Authority is taking forward and where they do exist they are usually broadly described. From the documents available so far, it is not clear how the Partnership will be able to sharply manage its performance or provide data on progressive implementation.
- 4.10 Monitoring of the Partnership Plan implementation may be challenging. The arrangements for monitoring performance against delivery of the actions will not use a single common approach or database but will rely on delivery partners monitoring performance and reporting back individually through the appropriate Strategic Overview Group. This may mean that up to date cross plan data on actions is difficult to generate quickly, particularly where there are multiple delivery partners for the individual action.

5 Theme 2: Setting and using priorities

Strengths:

- 5.1 The focus on key services is well understood. Staff have a very clear appreciation of their work and of the Authority's structure for service delivery work built around the three key communities of: land managers; community and business; and National Park users. They are involved well in the development of priorities.
- 5.2 Community engagement is strong on relevant priorities. The Authority has developed sound ties with communities and community organisations and uses



these well as a two way means of progressing priorities. Appropriate consultation is used to support this approach, for example the consultation on Cutcombe market which was considered excellent. The Authority strives to maintain good relationships and the considerable effort it puts into this has seen local concern groups become good working partners. The Authority also uses social media to instantly connect with audiences through its twitter presence providing and receiving real time views and comments on local issues.

- 5.3 Local issues and needs are well understood. The Authority is well connected to communities and listens well and understand the local issues and needs. The "Your Future" consultation process was extensive and well-structured and allowed the Authority to access the views of communities and stakeholders in an engaged way.
- 5.4 The process for determining priorities is sound. The use of an annual business planning workshop to review progress and set future direction in light of changing circumstances is helpful, as was the work of the Spending Review Advisory Panel. The use of the three key communities around which to structure service delivery and staffing seems to provide a user accessible approach to the delivery of priorities.
- 5.5 Good staff resource planning has taken place. Even prior to the most recent restructure, an earlier staff review took out about 25 per cent of posts and created new ones to match the needs of the previous NPMP. The process also released on-going fluid resources to fund projects and initiatives.
- 5.6 Choices have been made in service delivery priorities to match the available resources. Capacity reductions have led to: the cessation of in-house woodland management; an intention to reduce speed of response for public rights of way work with less capacity to support to land managers for their rights of way responsibilities. It has also seen a reduction in National Park Centres from 5 to 3; and reduced school contact time and community engagement for learning and outreach services.
- 5.7 External fundraising for priority areas of work has been impressive. The Authority has been successful in securing significant external funding in 2011-12 for partnership work. This included: £0.86m for the Moorland Landscape Partnership; £2m over five years for the MIRE project; £0.6m for the Lynmouth Pavilion, plus £26,000 for a heritage interpretation project; £20,000 for the Lynton and Lynmouth Neighbourhood Plan; three separate funding streams for forestry work amounting to £2.83m over five years. Other bids have seen: £85,000 for energy assessments; £10,000 to fund a partnership bid of up to £1m with the Communities Living Sustainably programme; £15,000 from Dark Skies Discovery; and a joint authority bid for £5m over five years for a Local Transport Fund.
- 5.8 Good focus has been maintained on delivering priorities. Of particular note is the sustained and robust approach to land management over a consistent period which has provided substantial benefits to the Authority, land owners and users and which has led to the effective work on the Uplands Task Force and a good understanding of the balance between farming and conservation.



Issues to consider:

- 5.9 Many partners and stakeholders are unclear about priorities. Whilst partners have been largely responsible for generating the future priorities, there are concerns about the way these have come together in the Partnership Plan, including: there being too many priorities; seeing the plan as too ambitious, or too overcomplicated; or partners being unsure of the overall impact of the programmes. Others don't follow the mapping between vision, objectives, programmes, and activities; and they questioned the emphasis on actions which are not equal in size or relevance, or which have not been weighted for national park purposes. The Authority recognises that the Partnership Plan is very new and that priorities may need time to embed. However, early action is needed to address some of these concerns in order to provide a clear focus on priorities and the right basis for jointly moving forward.
- 5.10 Partners are not yet clear how the priorities of young people will be addressed. The needs of young people in the park have not yet shown through in the priorities for the Authority. Whilst the Young Voices project is starting to give young people a profile it is not yet obvious how sustainability and economic work will be delivered for young people. Partners would like to see a better appreciation and exploration about the range of opportunities for land-based apprenticeships
- 5.11 All priorities can be seen as of equal importance. It is hard to determine the relevant importance of priorities and work programmes within the Partnership Plan and Business Plan and it is unclear how partners, staff and Members will determine how to prioritise their delivery or, as resources change, know which are the high priorities to be pursued, and which might have to be stopped. The Authority has recognised that it needs to ensure that Staff and Members have a consistent understanding of the new priorities and how they contribute to these and so re-establish the golden thread between strategic plans and workplace delivery. This may be helped by determining an order of priority.

6 Theme 3: Achievement of outcomes: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park

Strengths:

- 6.1 Strong outcomes are being delivered. High profile projects have been delivered, including: the Exmoor Mire restoration project which targets important moorland habitat and has seen over 50Km of ditch blocked at 12 moorland locations on Exmoor and resulted in the re-wetting of over 300 hectares of this globally scarce Blanket Bog habitat with its unique association of plants and animals; the Exmoor Moorland Unit Mapping and Moorland Landscape Partnership addressing the long term management of moor and heath; the Exmoor Dark Skies approach which has led to a designation as the only Dark Sky Reserve in Europe; targeted removal of 28 poles and 7200 metres of visually damaging power lines; and the reduction of invasive species through schemes such as the Knotweed Control partnership (450 sites treated in 2011 resulting in a significant reduction) and a 200 hectare Rhododendron removal programme.



- 6.2 Moorland management issues are being addressed well. The Authority is using a number of approaches to effectively support and improve moorland management. This includes: policy initiatives with Natural England; holding Swaling events to establish good practice and assess progress; research into vegetation recovery in burn sites; heather beetle mapping; using £30,000 of Landscape Partnership funding for moorland reconditioning issues such as tackling eyesores, conservation work at archaeological sites, promotion and grants for the moorland Exmoor Pony herds; and producing and discussing with owners and grazers moorland unit maps as a basis for future land management options.
- 6.3 Habitat conservation is making important differences. Over 95 per cent of SSSIs are in favourable or unfavourable-recovering condition (an increase from 71 per cent in 2007); a Local Wildlife Sites survey shows the majority of sites (81 per cent) remained fairly unchanged; the Ancient Woodland Project brought 700 hectares of woodland into Woodland Grant Schemes, with 99 per cent of woodland SSSI's in target condition, and work to secure threatened ancient woodland species begun on 5 major plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS); 17 new native woodlands were created within woodland habitat networks; 10 upland wetland sites were restored as part of the Mire Restoration Project; and salmon parr numbers increased by 20% on Little Exe in response to management through the Little Exe Project.
- 6.4 Active measures are in place to support native wildlife species. Dormouse nest boxes are monitored on five key sites and numbers are stable; advice on managing habitat for nightjar was provided to landowners; a public waxcap survey was carried out and advice provided to landowners for these species; across 140 sites Heath fritillary butterflies increased from 10 colonies in 2007 to 15 colonies in 2011, while high brown fritillaries increased with the highest ever counts being recorded in 2011, and high brown fritillaries have been found at three new sites: a 20 year programme to restore 20 ha of oak coppice habitat at Hawkcombe Wood NNR was initiated; bat conservation measures were incorporated in development control applications; there has been a managed increase in populations of thatch moss; surveys have revealed vital information about the response of river jelly lichen to weather conditions; a further 150 veteran trees were added to the record of 1000 known trees, many received urgent conservation work; 200 endemic whitebeams were surveyed and assessed in Culbone Wood to help target conservation and secure regeneration potential; seven pieces of research were commissioned and completed on the health of red deer, their genetics, culling, their impact on woodland ecology, their effect on the local economy as well as the non-native deer in the National Park. Other wildlife monitoring includes the County Wildlife Site survey and Exmoor Natural History Society providing a 1km survey of vascular plants.
- 6.5 Research and monitoring is improving the understanding of wildlife. Otters are monitored and are thriving; the spread of non-native signal crayfish has been monitored with native white-clawed crayfish now confined to one watercourse; woodland, farmland and the nationally important moorland birds are monitored with the Somerset Ornithological Society; and joint work is on-going with the RSPB to monitor species, conduct bird surveys and encourage volunteering.
- 6.6 The Heart of Exmoor scheme is an innovative landscape partnership. The focussing of external funding and partners effort on the three strands of



Reconnecting People, Reconnecting Livelihoods, and Reconditioning Moorland has allowed 15 projects to invest over £0.5m in Exmoor. Its many programmes are having a distinct impact on the Park. For example the appointment of three Moorkeepers is helping to support the conservation management of moorland and its enjoyment by the public, including help with controlled moorland burning, running guided walks, and providing advice and support for moorland users.

- 6.7 Landscape Conservation Grants are making an impact. The £100,000 Partnership Fund has allocated grants of up to £2,500 to 49 farms. This enabled local contractors to carry out work worth £200,000 on the laying of traditional hedgebanks. This strong part of the culture and economy of Exmoor maintains the feature and associated wildlife as well as providing wood fuel and local employment.
- 6.8 The Exmoor Hill Farm Project is helping maintain and improve heather moorland. Four small Moorland Management Fund grants have contributed towards the cost of projects to improve environmental practices such as swaling, scrub control, heather restoration and improved livestock grazing.
- 6.9 Sound joint working and good regional links underpin much of what is being achieved. For example the Wimbleball Lake catchment scheme for ecosystems services delivery is operated jointly with the Dartmoor National Park and Natural England. It will lead to a further project with Natural England and South West Water.
- 6.10 Good research, awareness raising and report work has been carried out to support the historic environment and archaeology such as on: the priorities for the historic environment; the Historic Environment Report Series; and the Building at Risk Survey. In addition, the West Somerset Mineral Railway project has been successful in preserving the site for future generations.
- 6.11 The quality of the conservation services provided is recognised. Partners consider that good work is being undertaken on conserving and protecting the environment and they are positive about the support from the Authority. This is reinforced by public surveys which show high levels of satisfaction from users of conservation services (77 per cent) and advice/support to farmers' and landowners (71 per cent). The recognition of the innovative Dark Sky project as the first designated European reserve is recognition of the quality of the provision being made.

Issues to consider:

- 6.12 Partners would like to see the Authority being more vocal about its achievements and making more of the successes there have been. They would also like to see the Authority sharing experiences with other bodies and participating in wider networks for the historic environment such as through the archaeology group that exist for the wider South West area.



7 Theme 4: Achievement of outcomes: promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities by the public

Strengths:

- 7.1 Delivery on rights of way is to a high standard. Good progress has been made on improving public rights of way (96 per cent easy to use in 2012 from 43 per cent 2006/7). An active programme of work has maintained the accessibility of rights of way and has: produced and installed 854 signs and 320 sign posts; produced 139 field gates; improve gate/style accessibility at 15 locations; created a new permitted bridleway; and improved six restricted byways with major surface improvements.
- 7.2 A good range of accessible activities exist. A positive approach is taken to the provision of activities and this has included: access awareness events; the 'Trampers on Exmoor' scheme; phototrails; activities for people with mental health and learning disabilities, joint work with the YHA to facilitate family visits and raise awareness amongst young people; and joint work with the National Citizenship Service. Website improvements have been made to meet user needs and there is support for tourism marketing. Improvements have also been to public toilet provision with eight out of nine retained facilities being upgraded to modern standards.
- 7.3 The engagement of new audiences demonstrates innovation and leadership. There is an excellent approach to equalities which shows through in the equality statement and in the commitment to a wide span of people whether for diversity or disabilities considerations. The Authority is strong on improving accessibility, building links and supporting local groups and communities, involvement with the Mosaic project, and engagement with other organisations and agencies to improve broad access.
- 7.4 The Community Champions' initiative has been particularly effective. The recruitment of 18 black and minority ethnic community champions has seen them become established in the work of the Authority. The project has been extended to recruit "Young Champions". Designed to create a connection with the National Park, the project allowed 18 young people to become champions from the 12 month scheme and to also gain a number of skills and personal benefits. The young people then act as mentors within youth organisations and this has been particularly successful. The approach which will now be used as a model for five other National Parks. A "Community Champions Disabled Users" group is also being pioneered working with the Campaign for National Parks to secure funding to undertake a national pilot.
- 7.5 Engaging and informative tourism publications are available. In addition to leaflets and booklets, including pocket guides in English, French and German, the Exmoor Visitor publication is a good quality document (110,000 print run) that provides detailed information for visitors and residents on a range of tourism, leisure and National Park interests.
- 7.6 High levels of satisfaction are shown in residents' surveys for promoting understanding services. This includes satisfaction with education services (91 per cent) and advice/support for tourism businesses (71 per cent).



Issues to consider:

- 7.7 The Exmoor brand profile needs building. The Exmoor brand of “dream – discover – explore” has been launched by the Exmoor Tourism Partnership to represent Exmoor as a place. The logo is not yet very evident perhaps because it is relatively new but it needs encouragement as the identity and positioning are a key element to giving important economic support to the area. The brand is seen as a positive move by businesses.
- 7.8 The profile of sustainable tourism could be higher. It is unclear how sustainable tourism will be pursued in a cohesive strategic way, particularly as there is no readily identifiable Access and Recreation Strategy or Sustainable Tourism Strategy to give this structure.

8 Theme 5: Achievement of outcomes: wider sustainable development

Strengths:

- 8.1 The Authority’s proactive work on broadband is valued by communities and partners. Broadband service provision has benefitted from the Authority’s considerable investment of time, influencing skills and finances into achieving better provision. Along with substantial external funding sources the Authority has set aside £150,000 of partnership funding to support broadband connectivity. This sound work has allowed high tech technological companies to consider re-locate to the area. The lead role on Defra’s Rural Communities Broadband Fund is a clear demonstration of the Authority’s ability to lead in this area.
- 8.2 Delivery of affordable housing is well supported. Affordable housing needs have received good consideration and the Rural Housing Enabler project hosted by the Authority brings local authorities and housing providers together and has seen the five year target for 2007-12 exceeded (67 units against a 60 target – projected to be 75).
- 8.3 Farming, forestry and field sports interests are addressed constructively. Business development, farm diversification and business expansions attract good support from the Authority and there is close working with a wide range of interests. Impressive work has been undertaken on behalf of livestock farming and the Authority’s willingness to lead and engage at a regional and national level has produced significant outcomes for the funding available for livestock farming. Close working has also led to the establishment of a FSC certification programme for local woodland products and a growing presence of game bird shoots. The Upland Task Force has led to many positive outcomes and has led to a strong sense of commonality between the Authority, farmers, agencies and NGOs. It was noted that the local model was now being applied in the North West where a similar group was being formed.
- 8.4 The Partnership Fund gave financial support to 21 bids during 2011-12. A total of £635,000 was allocated to schemes whose projected total value is about £10m. One recipient was the Rural Employment Enabler which is a good initiative for sustaining communities that used a partnership grant to support West Somerset Community College in the management of apprenticeship working with 36 students’ each year (108 in total over three years being placed).



- 8.5 The planning service is highly regarded and is seen as approachable on issues. A proactive approach is taken to development management and this is recognised across all sectors accessing planning services. The use of pre-application advice encourages high approval rates for applications (93-95 per cent) and good customer satisfaction (89 per cent) with general public satisfaction reasonable (69 per cent). Satisfaction with the planning service is amongst the highest for National Park Authorities.
- 8.6 Most parishes feel well connected to the work of the Authority. They receive good contact from the Authority and appreciate the consultation and feedback through the roadshow and consultation meetings, which are seen as excellent. Parishes feel that even without the meetings they have clear lines of communication and know who to contact. Relationships are strong and have allowed successful projects such as Snowdrop Valley to be started by the Authority and passed to the Parish Council to run.
- 8.7 Tourism interests are supported by the Authority. With tourism as the biggest element of the local economy (£90m p.a.) the Authority is an active member of the Exmoor Tourism Partnership. Support is given to initiatives such as the Exmoor Guinea and to training programmes.
- 8.8 The Exmoor Conservation Volunteer Partnership's work is facilitated by the Authority's volunteer coordinator and has increased the range and amount of volunteering (2,349 days in 2011-12 from 312 days in 2007-08) and the effort of partners is drawn together more. The on-line booking system has potential as a way for volunteers to match themselves to projects. There are examples of good projects such as the Big Adventure days at which volunteers lead events where 200-300 members of the public turn up each day, and the West Somerset Mineral Railway project promoting archaeology and heritage issues.
- 8.9 The Exmoor Young Voices approach is making an important contribution through its engagement of young people. The ability to influence policies and services, along with the research into the aspirations of young people is helping to make services appropriate and allows fuller involvement.
- 8.10 The Carbon Neutral National Park programme is impressive. Work on low carbon communities is very strong and the Authority is proactive and showing very good leadership in this area. Whilst this is potentially a very challenging aspiration the Authority has shown by its activities that it will address this robustly. The conducting of first National Park study to include emissions from land use started this off and has been followed by: support to communities, business and land managers in developing low carbon initiatives; five communities developing sustainable energy plans; delivery of a £400,000 Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) project for 10 exemplar sustainable energy projects comprising 20 installations; delivering a £85,000 DECC project involving energy assessments and improvements for three settlements; organising low carbon festivals; establishing the Carbon-neutral Exmoor Fund to revolve funds fed by feed-in tariffs from LCCC funded projects; development of the Exmoor Woodland Carbon Project; plus a range of other noteworthy projects such as the: Somerset Coastal Change Pathfinder, Exmoor Mine Restoration project, Exmoor unplugged for electric cycle hire and charging, Moor Rover for demand responsive transport, and participation in the Western Somerset Low Carbon Partnership. It also



provides good advice and support to businesses on sustainability issues for the accessing of renewables grants and external funding.

- 8.11 The Authority's own environmental performance is well advanced. A zero carbon action plan supported by the Zero Carbon Task Force is ensuring that the Authority makes significant progress towards its goal of achieving carbon zero emissions by 2020. CO2 emissions have fallen by 20 per cent over the three years to 2011-12. Good monitoring and a wide range of effective actions have been put in place, including: installation of solar panels; installing a new log boiler; installing a 12 Kw wind turbine; various energy efficiency improvements; a Green ICT approach; and a Green Travel Plan.

Issues to consider:

- 8.12 There is scope for more to be achieved on Exmoor through volunteers. The Authority and its partners could achieve more from the resources that are already available to coordinate volunteers. There are around 250-300 volunteers on the database with only about 50 regularly active across the partnership and only about 10 active directly with the Authority. With the start of the new Partnership Plan and Authority structure it would be beneficial to review the approach to volunteering and to access the best of good volunteering practice to find solutions that would best serve the Partnership and the Authority. It is timely to review the development and recruitment of volunteers to more clearly defined volunteer roles and to review the infrastructure that supports them. It may also be beneficial to explore: the production of a volunteer work plan; to assess any differences of volunteering use between partners; the opportunities for volunteers to meet for structured discussion; volunteer visibility; and the best approach to volunteer leadership at both a corporate and volunteer working party level.
- 8.13 Partners are very complimentary about the contribution that the Authority can make to discussions and their ability to help find solutions. They would like to see the Authority extending its influence through a higher profile on bodies that operate outside of the Park boundaries, such as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). They feel that such a presence could have reciprocal benefits.
- 8.14 Wider Socio-economic community needs exist. Stakeholders feel that some socio-economic aspects could receive further consideration. Examples include generational handover issues for family farming and the relationship it has with diversification, open market housing and the size limits on local needs housing. Whilst recognising that these are issues of national relevance stakeholders are keen for the Authority's to explore local solutions that might benefit the area.

9 Theme 6: Organisational capacity, use of resources, and governance

Strengths:

- 9.1 Sound financial management and monitoring in place. Good financial planning processes are underpinned by a comprehensive system of internal financial controls. The Medium Term Financial Plan 2012 -2015, updated annually, contains clear and realistic assumptions about future income levels, inflation and efficiency savings. Financial reporting is timely and well established with monthly



budget information provided to budget holders and quarterly reports to the Leadership Team on major projects and reserves. Committee reports highlight financial implications for decision makers.

- 9.2 There is a sound understanding of costs with benchmarking comparisons. The Authority understands its costs and performance and uses detailed analysis to support decisions on service redesign. It uses cost comparisons drawn from the National Parks Joint Improvement Group and uses business case assessments of projects in the Leadership Team.
- 9.3 Effective procurement practices are in place. Savings are being generating through the approach to sustainable procurement, with a checklist and guidance in place procurement. Shared services operate with constituent local authorities.
- 9.4 Sound governance arrangements exist. Appropriate, formally structured governance arrangements are supported by other mechanisms. The Chairman's Group is an effective way of discussing future planning and policy matters and supports the formal procedures, and the Members Forum is a constructive way of allowing members to raise issues and talk through potential differences. The roles and functions at Member and Officer level are clear.
- 9.5 Members are engaged well and supportive of the Authority. Members: relate well to the Partnership Plan; feel there is a lot more interaction between Members which makes them more fully involved; feel that organisational change has been handled exceptionally well, and have high regard for staff who they see as enthusiastic.
- 9.6 Risk management and internal control is robust. Risk management is embedded in the work of the Authority and a sound Risk Management Strategy is in place incorporating accessible risk assessment techniques and an intranet based system for risk assessments. A Business Continuity Plan is in place.
- 9.7 The Authority is good at handling change. The Authority has shown in the two major restructures it has undertaken that it can manage change well and still retain the confidence of its staff in difficult circumstances. This ability to lead and keep staff informed is reflected in the Investors in People report which was very positive and showed the Authority in a good light. Staff feel valued and are very happy with the positive cultural climate that exists and are complimentary about the Leadership and visibility of the Chief Executive and his communications with them.
- 9.8 Good HR policies and practises are in place. The Authority is committed to providing a productive and skilled workforce and is introducing a new Personnel Strategy 2012-2015 to take account of changed circumstances and which it must now implement as planned. There is a positive approach to Performance and Development Review (PDR) work with almost a 100 per cent completion rate. A competency framework is in place. A good equality statement is in place and the Authority is a 'Two Ticks' employer. Sickness levels are low (2.47 days per FTE 2011-12).

Issues to consider:



- 9.9 Performance management arrangements are in transition. The Authority is part way through changing its approach to the presentation of performance information and has not yet produced a new cycle of reports to show how the information will be displayed. It is important that reports are timely within the financial year and contain sufficient information for Members to appreciate the trends in performance and to determine what interventions may be necessary. Essentially the reports need to be an accountability and performance management tool rather than simply monitoring data. Whilst the previous style of reports was satisfactory and the inclusion of a simple traffic light signalling system allowed an easy grasp of performance against target it is not clear whether in a slimmed down approach this level of information will still be available to Members. The Authority is clear that it will be providing a fit for purpose system. It is important to ensure that the approach taken picks up on and reflects the good practice that already exists in the Authority and if necessary elsewhere within the National Park family.
- 9.10 Member appraisal and development arrangements need reviewing. There is currently no structured appraisal system to assess Member performance, nor is there a connected Member training and development programme, although training and development is taking place and members feel they receive a good level. Although most training is on an ad-hoc basis, or is connected to the work of the Authority, opportunity to address individual member development should be available and could enhance overall member performance.
- 9.11 The approach to project management needs embedding. Project management skills are not yet used consistently. The Authority has recognised that it needs to do more to fully establish a culture of consistent project management. It is already addressing this through a project management framework and training.

10 Theme 7: Leadership & Improving performance

Strengths:

- 10.1 Members and the Leadership Team have good profiles. The Chairman takes a lead nationally, regionally and locally e.g. with the English National Park Authorities Association, at local meetings and in tourism matters. Within the Authority the leadership of the Chief Executive is obvious. He also has a good profile in partner discussions where his contributions are well regarded by Stakeholders and where excellent personal relationships exist with heads of key partner organisations.
- 10.2 Partners value the Authority's contributions. Partners feel that engagement with them is very positive and that the Authority is a strong and good partner to work with. The Authority is seen to be good at bringing people together and providing clarity to discussions and identify solutions. For example partners feel that the success of the Exmoor Tourism partnership owes a lot to the facilitation ability of the Authority.
- 10.3 Partners are complimentary about the Authority's responsiveness. Partners see the Authority as refreshingly quick to get decisions from, responsive to request for input and prompt in replying to requests for information.



- 10.4 Good progress was made in delivering the 2007-12 NPMP targets. The Authority has performed well against previous plans including 71 per cent of NPMP targets being met fully and 19 per cent making good progress towards completion.
- 10.5 Continuous improvement is evident. The recent restructuring seems to have been well received and in many areas strengthened the focus of the Authority; the approach to consultation has improved and the Authority has learnt from experiences such as the Blackpits issue; and interventions are made when not performing up to standard, such as the new guidelines on member involvement in planning applications.

Issues to consider:

- 10.6 The new Leadership Team structure needs to bed in. The new leadership structure needs a little time to come together and gel further as a team and to cement cross departmental working. A leadership development programme is being designed and is expected to be developed by January 2013.
- 10.7 Clarity is needed on what can be achieved with the present resources. Whilst staff have been empowered to decline to take on work or response times that are not consistent with the revised resources, there is little evidence that staff are applying this and most consider that they are responding to requests and delivering the same quality of service in their work now as they did before the organisational changes. Whilst staff seem happy to continue in this way it may not be sustainable and the expectations of service users and Members need to be lowered.
- 10.8 Partner commitment is needed to ensure delivery of the Partnership Plan. As reported previously under KLOE themes 1 and 2, there is a need to quickly embed: a common understanding of the degree of partner connection with Partnership Plan priorities; and the delivery structure of a Partnership Panel with Strategic Overview Groups; to ensure that the Partnership Plan remains on schedule and delivers the right outcomes.
- 10.9 Partners would welcome discussion on the Authority's key pressures and challenges. Partners know that the Authority is good at listening but is not always as good at telling others about the issues they are facing. Whether for short term issues or longer term scenario planning many partners would welcome open discussion on current pressures and future challenges which they feel could be mutually beneficial and which may help set expectations at the right level.



11 Good Practice and Special Features

- 11.1 Relationships with partners.
- 11.2 Community engagement and communication.
- 11.3 External fundraising
- 11.4 Community Champions and Young Champions
- 11.5 Connection to and advocacy for the farming community
- 11.6 Delivery of the Planning Service
- 11.7 The Carbon Neutral National Park programme
- 11.8 Handling organisational change

12 Recommendations

- 12.1 The recommendations of the team are shown below with the detailed points arranged under the seven themes of the Key Lines of Enquiry.

1. Quality of vision and the Authority's plans to help achieve it

- 12.2 Ensure that partners understand and are adequately connected to the operation of the Partnership Panel and the Strategic Overview Groups.[4.8 & 10.9]
- 12.3 Establish and implement a good practice approach to producing measurable outcomes, milestones or targets for Partnership Plan and Business Plan activities sufficient for the Partnership and Authority to be able to manage performance and produce data on progressive implementation.[4.9]
- 12.4 Develop with partners a common approach to monitoring Partnership Plan implementation sufficient for the production of meaningful data on actions, particularly where there are multiple delivery partners for the individual action. [4.10]

2. Setting and using priorities

- 12.5 Ensure that the delivery of Partnership Plan priorities is accepted and owned by partners. [5.9 & 10.8]
- 12.6 Consider whether the priorities of young people are being adequately addressed. [5.10]
- 12.7 Consider whether there should be a clear hierarchy amongst priorities. [5.11]



3. Achievement of outcomes: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park

No recommendations

4. Achievement of outcomes: promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities by the public

- 12.8 Consider how the profile and importance of the new Exmoor brand might be encouraged. [7.7]
- 12.9 Establish a strategic approach to sustainable tourism. [7.8]

5. Achievement of outcomes: wider sustainable development

- 12.10 Review the approach to volunteers and their operational remit. [8.12]
- 12.11 Consider having a higher profile on bodies that operate outside of the Park boundaries but which have a potential impact within it. [8.13]
- 12.12 Consider whether socio-economic aspects around young people and generational handover for family farming warrant consideration. [8.14]

6. Organisational capacity, use of resources, and governance

- 12.13 In developing the new performance management arrangements ensure that it incorporates good practice, remains timely and contains sufficient information suitable for managing as well as monitoring performance.[9.9]
- 12.14 Review Member appraisal and member development arrangements.[9.10]

7. Improving performance

- 12.15 Continue to clarify for staff, Members and stakeholders what can reasonably be achieved with the present resources. [10.7]
- 12.16 Ensure partner commitment and a common understanding towards the delivery of the Partnership Plan. [10.8 & 4.8 & 5.9]
- 12.17 Consider whether there is a place for discussions with partners about the Authority's key short term pressures and challenges and longer term scenario planning. [10.9]



13 Summary of Assessment Scores

13.1 The teams assessment of scores for each of the KLOE themes are as follows:

Key Line of Enquiry	Score
1. Quality of Vision	3
2. Setting and Using Priorities	3
3. Achievement of Outcomes: Conservation	4
4. Achievement of Outcomes: Promoting Understanding and Service Delivery	3
5. Achievement of Outcomes: Wider Sustainable Development	4
6. Use of Resources: Managing Finances Governing the Business Managing Resources Use of Resources – Overall score	3
7. Leadership & Improving Performance	3

SCORING

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements – **performs poorly**
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements – **performs adequately**
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements – **performs well**
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements – **performs excellently.**

With a grading of 2 as acceptable baseline performance, an Authority that obtains a grading of 3 for a theme will be performing in an above average way and delivering to a very high standard. A grading of 4 will show exceptional delivery.

Ken Lloyd on behalf of SOLACE Enterprises
October 2012

